OtherHand

Epilogue

In previous discussions I had with Deputy Winkler of the Inyo Sheriff's Office, he had mentioned that during the OES search a team shortly after leaving the site came across an interesting bone, took photos and GPS coords of its location. Since it was a little distance from the main site, when the helicopter team went in to recover all the flagged remains, this item was missed. This was unfortunate, as the photo suggested it could be a child's clavicle, but it was far from certain without actually seeing it.

In planning our assorted trips into the area, I kept Deputy Winkler informed about what we were up to and our intentions. On two occasions I suggested that since we'd be in the area, we'd be happy to swing by the coordinates noted, see if there was anything to it and take more photos without disturbing the bone. Each time, he just ignored what I said and the discussion moved on. I decided not to press the issue and chalked it up to the usual one way flow of information that I've experienced working with most agencies. They are quick to accept whatever you have to offer, but always seem to find reasons not to share what they have. I understand why this happens, but I don't like it much.

On December 6, 2010 I received a phone call from Deputy Winkler. About a week prior (about two weeks after our final trip) Inyo County took a helicopter out to the mystery coordinates and dropped off 4 or 5 people for an overnight stay. They covered that area and found some children's shoes, and well as some small bones, possibly of the children. These bones, as well as those presumed to be Cornelia's, were going to be sent to an advanced research facility in the Midwest to attempt DNA recovery. That process was expected to take 3 months.

I asked about when they might be releasing info to the public and he said they were having

a meeting about it that afternoon to decide what to do. The case wouldn't be officially closed until DNA came back. One of the main points he wanted to get across to me was that if our motley group went back out there and found anything, the Inyo County Sheriff's Office didn't want it. He also said they had returned the personal effects to the families in Germany, and wished to do so with the bones.

I asked him where they found the kid's stuff, and he said about 75 yards from the knoll. I'm inclined to think this location is BS (Winkler wasn't actually there). There had been plenty of coverage near the site, including what we did, which extended well beyond 75 yards. When Winkler first told me about the possible child's bone find he thought it was about 1/2 mile away from the site. Since it was found by a departing searcher, it would have had to have been northwest of the site, on the route to the crest. On our last trip we passed through part of that area as we headed northeast to climb a light colored hill which the area panorama picture was taken from. He also mentioned the shoes were found north of the site, in a wash. This also sounded very odd to me, being familiar with the terrain. So I got location answers that were literally all over the landscape.

So that was it, perhaps it was **really** all over at last.

I always found Winkler to be a good guy to deal with and he did a great job running the OES search. But it felt more than a little galling that these Inyo guys had been sitting on a location for almost a year while we were busting our asses to get in and search. Had they shared their info, then perhaps things could have been brought to a closure in April. Of course then it wouldn't have been by Inyo County folks, and maybe that was important to them. There's more I could write about this….But I think I'll just shut up and let it all be.

As a followup to preparing this narrative, on April 11, 2012 I sent an email to Carma Roper, the Public Information Officer for the Inyo County Sheriff's office. She and I had exchanged email correspondence shortly after we first found the Germans. I said that I knew about the helicopter trip in and the recovery of some additional items and remains, but that I never saw any sort of official announcement from their office of either the recovery or any results. I asked her if any further identifications had been made.

She never responded.

That sort of treatment is typical of the level of professionalism I've experienced from the Inyo County Sheriff's Office. And I have taken away a very valuable lesson from it all. If I ever find myself in a dire situation in the backcountry of Inyo County and require rescue, I would crawl on bloody hands and knees over miles of jagged rock until I reached either the Kern or San Bernardino County lines. Then, and only then, would I set off my Personal Locator Beacon or SPOT device. A person needs to do everything possible to maximize survival....

Note to readers: After publishing this and getting a little feedback, it occurred to me the last paragraph could be construed as a dig against the Inyo search and rescue team. It's certainly not intended as such. I've never really met the Inyo guys and have no issues with them. I have a lot of respect for any SAR team. They are volunteers and put themselves out there in often lousy conditions for no reward other than saving someone's butt. However under California law, search and rescue operations are the responsibility of the Sheriff of each county. So the Inyo SAR team works under the direction of the Inyo Sheriff. And my experiences with ***that*** *agency, only a few of which I've related here, give me pause.*

You're done. Back to the Hunt for the Death Valley Germans main page

Oh wait.....Before you go.....If you enjoyed wasting waaaay too much of your time reading about pointless searches in the desert, you might be interested in the story of my Hunt for 928. It's the sorry tale of a search I did a number of years ago for a classified spy plane that crashed on its return to its base at Groom Lake. You know....Area 51. It's an older story but still holds up and very few other people have ever been to the crash site since. Hunting weird shit in the desert can be addictive, and that damn 928 was my gateway drug.